

Using Digital Technology to Improve Legal Education - Continuing the Exploration

**Ave Marie School of Law- Aug.
16, 2001**

**Peter W. Martin
Jane M.G. Foster Prof. of Law &
Co-Director Legal Information Institute,
Cornell**

=>

The Background

**The LII's ongoing experiment
and this summer's workshop**

=>

Breaking free of the time/space constraints of the classroom

I. The LII on-line courses and summer workshop

II. The key components

**III. How we have fit those components together into a full
course**

IV. Some observations on the "how" of it

V. Concluding thoughts and questions

I. The LII on-line courses and summer workshop

Characteristics of these two course (and my aims in them):

- **Upper-class electives**
- **Content- focused with a statutory core**
 - **not research courses**
 - **not clinical or skills development courses**
- **Considerable potential for versioning**

The institutional predicate:

- **Cornell's Legal Information Institute as virtual library and publisher**
- **A small, highly collaborative work group (Bruce, Crooks, Hughes and Martin)**
- **Other law schools prepared to buy in: (Ariz. State, Chicago-Kent, Kansas, Rutgers (N & C), Seattle, Vermont)**

What these courses offer today's project: These courses provide both specimens and a record (however WYSINWTG)

- **Copyright '00 =>**
- **Social Security Law '01 =>**

II. The Key Components

For presentation: Streaming audio linked to assigned texts and illustrative material => | =>

Readings: All digital (what that means and doesn't) =>

Initial self-testing of mastery: Computer-based tutorials and exercises (tightly integrated with the readings and presentation material) => | =>

Discussion: Asynchronous but paced teacher-student, student-student written discussion (WebBoard/WebX), often around a problem on which all have been encouraged to take a tentative position =>

Accountability and evaluation points with timely feedback: Close tracking of student involvement (submissions, discussion), four problems spaced evenly through the term and an end of course "take home" exam

Appropriate data system: On-line registration, on-line submission of assignments, on-line grading -- all managed by a capable back-end database =>

E-mail both individual and broadcast: Office hours, administrative announcements, personal reassurance or prompting "where have you been", generic feedback on exercises, and regular "here's where we are and this is what is coming next" messages

III. How We Have Fit Those Components Together

From the top: As seen by a student =>

Some important structural features and what they achieve:

- **Class sessions sized and shaped to the topic =>**
 - **An on-demand, endlessly patient, on-line law teacher**
 - **Tight integration of discussion and core texts**
 - **Frequent opportunities for self-appraisal**
 - **Pacing with flexibility**
 - **Close monitoring of student performance and engagement with feedback**
 - **Modularity**
-

IV. Some Observations on the "How" of It

Constructed directly from and then taught in parallel with conventionally taught versions of the same course:

- **At least a year of preliminary work and "capture"**
- **The importance (for now) of the conventional classroom-anchored course as reference, model, laboratory, measure**

The presentations:

- **Desktop tools keep creation and modification in the teacher's office**
 - **As a consequence they shorten the creation and modification cycle (and keep costs low)**
- **With this content and this market right now the streaming "voice over" Web tour has huge advantages over video and CD delivery as the principal mode**
 - **Saving video for special cases: Napster oral argument | FDR -1935**

V. Some Concluding Thoughts and Questions

The technology, pedagogy mix we have chosen for content delivery and interaction appears sound. [Students A | B | C]

It can deliver very positive educational outcomes with levels of investment that are within the reach of law schools.

Cultural barriers and institutional inertia appear to represent more serious obstacles than technology or cost to realizing the potential gains.

Moving from courses done by an experimentalist or two to significant program mass will be a challenge.

Creating and continuing on-line courses cannot be done as a solo venture.

Administrative and tech support are critical elements -- emphatically so should on-line courses be offered to other than students within an existing student body.

Next steps?

- At Cornell**
- Further exchange: An invitation ... and =>**

Student A

I think a course in this format is a great idea. I feel that some barriers to my success will be remedied in the future. The measure of time spent, which I feel was more than the average course, was often a function of internet connection speed. Additionally, as students get younger, they will inevitably have more experience in "learning" in this format. This simply wasn't the format for "learning" that I was used to and I think the adjustment took too long for me.

Student B

Technical problems have plagued me throughout the semester. It has been almost impossible to predict how much time one would spend in a sitting because of time wasted in resolving technical problems. As a result, there were many 2 hours sessions in which I did not learn a thing. That

aside, I will take a similar course again WITH BETTER EQUIPMENT the next time around.

Student C

I really enjoyed the set-up and information taught in this course. I think that in the first week it was a challenge just to figure out how to join in web board discussions and how to manage time per topic, but the schedule was great and soon the web board became easy, fun and interesting. This class was taught clearly and helpfully, and I really liked the freedom to do the course work as I chose throughout the timeframe given. I felt that it was easy to plan to listen to the lectures early in the topic week and read the cases as the week progressed.

Questions and Comments
martin@lii.law.cornell.edu